

# Summit of Our Connection

## KibaSniper

Ishimaru was in the middle of a warzone.

Snow crunched underneath his boots. The wind was blustering, the chill nipping his nose and ears. He hurried across the seemingly endless white field, avoiding assaults volleying at every angle. Shouts, jeers, and laughter intermingled, an otherwise pleasant cacophony if not for the rapid blows being dealt all around him.

Everywhere Ishimaru looked, the students of Hope's Peak Academy were a part of the snowball fight. The resort grounds, blanketed in steadily falling snow from the thick clouds painted on the pale gray sky, provided the perfect place for them to engage in a free-for-all jamboree. Ishimaru was grinning to himself, evading a snowball tossed by the astronaut from the 79th class. He whipped his snowball in retaliation, and it crashed into Momota's face. Momota yelped, blinded as he fell into Saihara, and they crashed down in a tangled mess of limbs.

Ishimaru cheered, pumping his fist in the air. "An excellent attempt, Momota-kun, but I'd suggest practicing your aim!"

But he couldn't linger on his victory. Harukawa had him in her crosshairs. As Saihara tended to Momota, Harukawa was chucking snowball after snowball at Ishimaru. He gritted his teeth, his body stinging from her precise strikes. As every snowball smashed into him, Ishimaru wondered if she should have been called the Super High School Level Softball Player.

"E-Excellent form, Harukawa-kun! You should try out for an afterschool sports team!" he shouted, lowering his arms from his face when she stopped.

Harukawa was glaring at him, but her expression quickly softened. The corner of her mouth lifted. "Same to you. Your aim is alright," she called over her shoulder, returning to Momota's side.

Weakened by Harukawa's barrage, a snowball to the left side of Ishimaru's face threw him off his feet. He sunk into the snow. Ishimaru shivered as if somebody doused him in icy water. Rolling to his side, he rubbed his jaw, muffling a groan. The girlish cheer affirmed the identity of his assailant as Asahina, who scampered back into the battle with Oogami defending her.

Harukawa had already directed her attention to the approaching Iruma and Ouma when Ishimaru stood. She had invented a peculiar snowball-making contraption strapped around her body. It reminded Ishimaru of an eccentric vacuum. Ouma was ordering her to attack using crass language that Ishimaru would never dare to repeat. But his insults were like fuel to Iruma's fire. She shot her frosty projectiles at everyone around them, cackling at the top of her lungs, and Ishimaru retreated while Harukawa and Momota engaged her.

Catching his breath, he observed the battlefield. He found Celes, Tojo, and Sonia drinking tea together under the comfortable shade of the nearby pine trees. Tojo had encircled their gathering with several opened umbrellas and scattered them like shields. Ishimaru wasn't sure if Tojo's defense was needed; Celes' short fuse would have ignited if anyone so much as grazed her silk coat.

He would have been remiss to ignore Kuwata's exceptional skills. Kuwata was hurling his snowballs at a lightning-fast pace. He struck Souda and Kuzuryuu in rapid succession before they could blink. Pekoyama unsheathed her bamboo blade and gave chase like a huntress. Kuwata shrieked and covered his head, scrambling away from her in a scene that reminded Ishimaru of the old cartoons he watched while studying on the weekend as a child.

Sighing, he let his eyes widen when he spotted the class representative of Class 77-B. Nanami was asleep in the middle of making a snow angel. A line of drool had crystallized on her cheek. Chabashira seemed to have volunteered to defend Nanami while she slumbered, throwing any student who came near them. Although strange, Ishimaru admired Chabashira's tenacity and technique.

But he couldn't linger on the odd sight. He had caught eyes with the Super High School Level Gymnast. Owari broke into a toothy grin, and Ishimaru flashed one of his own. They both dove for the snow, quickly rolling up their ammunition. Owari rose first and dashed toward him, and she flung it right at the space between Ishimaru's eyes.

"Head's up, hall monitor!" she sneered, digging her heels.

Ishimaru let his boot slip. He jerked forward, bending his right knee to keep himself elevated at an angle. As Owari gasped, he whipped his snowball at her stomach. Owari grimaced and flipped to the side, her athletic prowess just as admirable as Harukawa's accuracy.

Still, his snowball nicked the tips of her wild, brunette locks. She clicked her tongue, smirking and slowly nodding to herself. Ishimaru smoothed down the wrinkles in his sleek, black coat, concerned by her lack of winter apparel, but he dismissed that thought when she clawed through the snow like a bear.

He hesitated, a chill running down his spine. A large shadow suddenly crossed over him. As he pivoted on his heels, Owari roared. Caught between a rock and a hard place, Ishimaru dove from the fray, the air rippling with heat and energy that melted the surrounding snow.

Gripping the grass, Ishimaru felt sweat drip down his face and fall off the tip of his nose. He sucked in a breath and peered over his shoulder. Owari and Nidai's fists connected, their knuckles cracking and creating another wave of palpable energy. Nidai swung his other arm forward, and Owari gripped his wrist, twisting herself in mid-air to crash her knee into his incoming punch.

Ishimaru blinked, baffled. He drew to his feet, deciding it was best to not involve himself with their fisticuffs. And the surge of uncomfortably hot, energetic air emanating from their brawl prickled his skin and dampened his brow, causing him to wipe his forehead with his cuffed sleeve.

“Bro, your face is redder than a baboon’s ass.”

A familiar voice shot through Ishimaru’s left ear and out through his right ear. His shoulders hitched, then quickly lowered. He breathed in so deeply through his nose that the wind chill made his lungs ache, and as snowballs flew, Ishimaru leered at his closest classmate.

Oowada had supplied the crude comment completely unprompted. Ishimaru furrowed his brows and pursed his lips. Offense colored his cheeks a darker crimson than the breeze or energy exuding from the fight behind him, and Ishimaru raised his equally scarlet scarf to his chin.

“Really? You’re going to make that remark now?” he asked, crouching low as Nidai guided Owari to a less populated arena, the gymnast cartwheeling after him.

Oowada was smirking. He effortlessly broke through the snow, the crunch filling their ears as he gathered enough to form a decently sized snowball. He chucked it into the brawl, missing Naegi by a hair for it to collide with an unlucky upperclassman.

“Bullseye!” he shouted, clenching his fist. He uttered a short bark of laughter when Ishimaru followed suit, his snowball breaking on the same student’s shoulder. “Nice shot, man!”

“Apologizes for the coordinated strike, Komaeda-kun! It was unintentional!” Ishimaru proclaimed, chuckling as Komaeda smiled and waved to them. He turned to his friend. “And thank you, Oowada-kun! I didn’t see you when this free-for-all began. Where were you?”

Snowflakes crested on his curly pompadour as he sucked in a breath through his teeth. “Eh, I lost my room key back at the resort. I ran around like a rat in a maze lookin’ for it,” he replied, shrugging. He patted the pocket of his familiar coat. “Thought I stuck it in here, but turns out I lost it in the john at the foyer.”

“That’s why there are coat hangers in public restrooms to prevent such a situation,” Ishimaru stated, straight-laced.

Oowada grumbled, but he quickly hitched his thumb over his shoulder. “Whatever. I’m thinking of taking a ride around one of the mountain trails before dinner. You want in?”

A grin broke on Ishimaru’s face. It had been a while since he rode with Oowada. Although he had to constantly remind Oowada about the rules of the road, a rush of exhilaration had flooded through him. While they had blasted off at high speeds, his voice almost drowning in the roar of the revving engine, Ishimaru always felt like a tornado moving with purpose.

“Of course! It’ll be an excellent reprieve,” he said, laughing as a snowball broke against his calves.

“Yeah, you look like you’ve been runnin’ yourself ragged out here,” Oowada replied, smirking, and Ishimaru wholeheartedly agreed.

As they fled the warzone, Ishimaru glanced over his shoulder. His fellow classmates and students still laughed and performed to the best of their abilities. Even Fujisaki, sitting on Oogami’s shoulder and supported by Asahina, managed to clip Saionji in the back of her obi, Koizumi taking photographs of the entire debacle.

He sighed out a puff of white air. Removing his scarf, he rolled it up and shoved it into his pocket. “So, Oowada-kun, I don’t believe we’ve explored those roads yet,” he said as they walked off the field and onto a paved path.

“Exactly. I read in the tourist guide that there’s this one road that loops around to the highest point of the tallest mountain,” he informed, raising his finger to the distance. Ishimaru spotted the white tops of the gray mountains over the thick forest of pine trees. “Should be a good place to ride.”

A deep laugh burst from Ishimaru. “Indeed! I’m looking forward to it.”

They were headed toward the front gates of the resort that extended out to an enormous parking lot. While the actual hotel was sequestered deep within the compound, their attention stayed on the metal bars. Oowada’s bike was parked near them. Ishimaru recalled the concern it had caused Oowada when the management staff voiced other guests’ potential noise complaints when they arrived.

But they were going off the property and wouldn’t raise a ruckus. Ishimaru failed to see why the employee glared at them from his station by the gates. Oowada shrugged at him, his lip curling, and he muttered to Ishimaru that the workers simply disliked the appearance of his bike.

“Well, they should be more mindful of their patrons, especially when you have adhered to their rules,” Ishimaru replied as Oowada slipped off a black helmet from the handlebars. “You haven’t made a single skid mark out here, either.”

“That’s what I’m sayin’. Those jackasses don’t respect me at all,” Oowada snapped, flipping up the kickstand.

Ishimaru fixed the helmet on his head. “You’ve been cooperative, Oowada-kun. I’ll be sure to leave a complaint with their superiors when we leave for Hope’s Peak.” He puffed out his chest. “That should fix their poor attitudes.”



He grunted. “Eh, thanks, but don’t bother. I’m pretty sure the whole staff is in cahoots.”

Ishimaru acquiesced, burying the nagging whisper in his head to criticize the staff. He swung his leg over the bike and made himself comfortable in the leather seat. Oowada grabbed the other helmet off the handlebars and pressed it down on his head, matting out his pompadour. Ishimaru bit back a snicker as Oowada snorted, combing his hair underneath the helmet with his fingers.

“Ya know, this would be easier if you let me ride without a helmet,” he muttered, taking his spot in front of Ishimaru. He removed his key from his pocket and shoved it into the ignition.

“Like I always say, safety first, kyoudai!” Ishimaru exclaimed over the sudden roar of the engine.

A gust of arctic wind slammed into Ishimaru when Oowada peeled out of the parking lot. Even with his thick clothing, the chill pierced through his skin. Gnawing on his lip, he wreathed his arms around Oowada’s waist and instinctively squeezed his eyes shut. Oowada was saying something, but the words were muffled in the air, his ears popping from their sharp bout of speed.

When Ishimaru opened his eyes, he readjusted to their surroundings. They were heading north toward the mountain. A fresh pine scent hit his nostrils. Gazing to his right, he found a gathering of evergreens, their brown branches beginning to become bare.

The hum of the engine filled the silence. Oowada concentrated on driving, and Ishimaru peered over his broad shoulder. They approached the base of the mountain that blocked out the sky. When Ishimaru gazed upward, countless snowy paths splintered across the rocky ridges. Their pace slowed as they elevated, Oowada keeping his eyes on the few vehicles in front of them. Ishimaru turned his head to the plethora of pine trees and evergreens, observing as they faded into a web of intense green and brown hues the farther they traveled uphill.

As Oowada hugged the curb, Ishimaru was inspecting the mountain range. They had made it halfway up, the cold increasing and nipping at his neck, but he found himself in silent awe. Everywhere Ishimaru looked, he located dozens of smaller mountains. They were capped with fresh snow untouched by human hands. He even spotted stray goats lingering on the short edges of the cliffs, dumbfounded by their ability to traverse such unstable ground.

“Weird creatures, ain’t they?” Oowada called over his shoulder.

“The ability to balance on such a tiny piece of rock jutting out from the mountain is truly incredible,” he replied, and he carefully gestured in front of them. “Oowada-kun, that seems like a proper place to take in the view!”

Oowada nodded. In front of them, Ishimaru had pointed out a pit stop. It was free of any other cars or people. Oowada slowed to a crawl and parked. Cutting the engine, he immediately

yanked the helmet off his head and heaved out a sigh, blowing out a puff of air like a small cumulus cloud.

“Can’t tell you how much I hate wearing this crap,” he grumbled, mussing through his curls.

Removing his own helmet, Ishimaru smirked. “Again, need I remind you about safety first, kyoudai?”

“Yeah, I need to hear that about ten hundred more times before it’s ingrained in my brain,” he snorted, his grin betraying his sarcasm.

They set helmets on the handlebars and approached the guard rail. Oowada rested his shoe on it and hunched forward, peering at the weather-beaten forest. Ishimaru examined the mountains, watching where gray rock united with white snow, the air crisper as it blew on the trim of his coat.

At the same time, they were drawn to the sky. Thin streaks of fog wafted around them. Thick clouds hung heavy above their heads, closer than ever before. Snowflakes steadily fell onto their faces and accumulated in their hair. Ishimaru raised his palm, catching a few of them, feeling them melt into cool droplets that sunk through his glove and on his calloused palm.

Oowada whistled. “We’re so far from Hope’s Peak. It’s like we’re in a different world up here.”

“I agree! It’s an excellent location to cultivate a sense of appreciation for nature,” Ishimaru proclaimed, and he threw his arms out. Breathing in deeply, he filled his lungs with fresh air. “And the oxygen here is free from pollutants! It will energize even the most tired of men!”

Oowada followed his lead. His eyes widened, choking out a short gasp. “Whoa! Man, you’re right! Compared to the city, this is fresher than the stuff pumpin’ out from the air purifier at the school lab!”

“An excellent comparison! This is nature in its purest form!”

Ishimaru expected a witty response, but Oowada fixed his expression into something discernable. He was pursing his lips. Oowada gripped the guard rail, exploring everything that they could see together. Ishimaru took his spot next to him, matching his posture and focusing on the way Oowada’s gaze glanced in all directions.

Noticing Ishimaru staring at him, Oowada rubbed his neck. Heat colored his cheeks a rosy red. Ishimaru did not have any need to look elsewhere and continued monitoring Oowada.

“I’ll, uh, just come out with it as a man should,” he said, and he offered his closed hand to Ishimaru. “I’m glad I’m seein’ this with ya. I mean, I don’t think I’d resonate with all of this otherwise. If I was by myself, it would have just been another ride.”

A large smile played on Ishimaru’s lips. He pressed his knuckles against Oowada’s fist. Oowada’s eyes widened, but it lasted only a brief moment. Warmth was fostered between them, spreading from Ishimaru to Oowada. He clasped Oowada’s hand and squeezed it, shaking with enough conviction to reassure Oowada of his honesty.

Ishimaru lowered his voice. “Of course, Oowada-kun. I couldn’t agree more.”

He smirked and clutched Ishimaru’s hand. “Hell yeah! That’s the spirit, kyoudai!”

“The spirit of nature, that is!”

Their laughter echoed throughout the mountain range. Ishimaru wondered if the wind carried their voices to their classmates. Oowada clapped his other hand on his shoulder, and Ishimaru swung his arm around Oowada’s neck, their hands still clasped together, the snowflakes still dusting their hair.